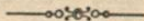


The light, as he discovered upon a second look, came through curtains stretched across a passage similar to the one he was in, and was faint, but enough to disclose two objects, the sight of which touched him with a fierce delight, — the tray on the floor, its contents untouched, and a rope ladder by which to descend.

He lost no time now. Placing his dagger between his teeth, he swung off, though with some trouble, and landed safely. At his feet, then, lay a repast to satisfy the daintiest appetite, — fish, white bread, chocolate, in silver cups and beaten into honeyed foam, and fruits from vine and tree. He clasped his hands and looked to Heaven, and, as became a pious Spaniard, restrained the maladies that afflicted him, while he said the old Paternoster, — dear, hallowed utterance taught him in childhood by the mother who, but for this godsend, would have lost him forever. Then he stooped to help himself, and while his hand was upon the bread the curtain parted, and he saw, amidst a flood of light pouring in over her head and shoulders, a girl, very young and very beautiful.



CHAPTER VIII.

THE PABA'S ANGEL.

IF I were writing a tale less true, or were at all accomplished in the charming art of the story-teller, which has come to be regarded as but little inferior to that of the poet, possibly I could have disguised the incidents of the preceding chapters so as to have checked anticipation. But many pages back the reader no doubt discovered that the *Cû* in which the page took shelter was that of *Quetzal'*; and now, while to believe I could, by any arrangement or conceit con-

sistent with truth, agreeably surprise a friend, I must admit that he is a dull witling who failed, at the parting of the curtain as above given, to recognize the child of the paba, — *Tecetl*, to whom, beyond peradventure, the memory of all who follow me to this point has often returned, in tender sympathy for the victim of an insanity so strange or — as the critic must decide — a philosophy so cruel.

Now, however, she glides again into the current of my story, one of those wingless waifs which we have all at one time or another seen, and which, if not from heaven, as their purity and beauty suggest, are, at least, ready to be wafted there.

I stop to say that, during the months past, as before, her life had gone sweetly, pleasantly, without ruffle or labor or care or sickness, or division, even, into hours and days and nights, — a flowing onward, like time, — an existence so serenely perfect as not to be a subject of consciousness. Her occupation was a round of gentle ministrations to the paba. Her experience was still limited to the chamber, its contents and expositions. If the philosophy of the venerable mystic — that ignorance of humanity is happiness — was correct, then was she happy as mortal can be, for as yet she had not seen a human being other than himself. Her pleasure was still to chatter and chirrup with the friendly birds; or to gather flowers and fashion them into wreaths and garlands to be offered at the altar of the god to whom she herself had been so relentlessly devoted; or to lie at rest upon the couch, and listen to the tinkling voices of the fountain, or join in their melody. And as I do not know why, in speaking of her life, I should be silent as to that part which is lost in slumber, particularly when the allusion will help me illustrate her matchless innocency of nature, I will say, further, that sleep came to her as to children, irregularly and in the midst of play, and waking was followed by no in-

terval of heaviness, or brooding over a daily task, or bracing the soul for a duty. In fact, she was still a child; though not to be thought dealing with anything seraphic, I will add, that in the months past she had in height become quite womanly, while the tone of her voice had gained an equality, and her figure a fulness, indicative of quick maturity.

Nor had the "World" undergone any change. The universal exposition on the walls and ceiling remained the same surpassing marvel of art. At stated periods, workmen had come, and, through the shaft constructed for the purpose, like those in deep mines, lifted to the *azoteas* such plants and shrubs as showed signs of suffering for the indispensable sun; but as, on such occasions, others were let down, and rolled to the vacant places, there was never an abatement of the garden freshness that prevailed in the chamber. The noise of the work disturbed the birds, but never Tecetl, whose spirit during the time was under the mesmeric Will of the paba.

There was a particular, however, in which the god who was supposed to have the house in keeping had not been so gracious. A few days before the page appeared at the door, — exactness requires me to say the day of the paba's last interview with Guatamozin, — Mualox came down from the sanctuary in an unusual state of mind and body. He was silent and exhausted; his knees tottered, as, with never a smile or pleasant word, or kiss in reply to the salutation he received, he went to the couch to lie down. He seemed like one asleep; yet he did not sleep, but lay with his eyes fixed vacantly on the ceiling, his hand idly stroking his beard.

In vain Tecetl plied all her little arts; she sang to him, caressed him, brought her vases and choicest flowers and sweetest singing-birds, and asked a thousand questions about the fair, good Quetzal', — a topic theretofore of never-failing interest to the holy man.

She had never known sickness, — so kindly had the god dealt by her. Her acquaintance with infirmity of any kind was limited to the fatigue of play, and the weariness of tending flowers and birds. Her saddest experience had been to see the latter sicken and die. All her further knowledge of death was when it came and touched a plant, withering leaf and bud. To die was the end of such things; but they — the paba and herself — were not as such: they were above death; Quetzal' was immortal, and, happy souls! they were to serve him for ever and ever. Possessed of such faith, she was not alarmed by the good man's condition; on the contrary, taking his silence as a wish to be let alone, she turned and sought her amusements.

And as to his ailment. If there be such a thing as a broken heart, his was broken. He had lived, as noticed before, for a single purpose, hope of which had kept him alive, survivor of a mighty brotherhood. That hope the 'tzin in the last interview took away with him; and an old man without a hope is already dead.

Measuring time in the chamber by its upper-world divisions, noon and night came, and still the paba lay in the dismal coma. Twice the slave had appeared at the door with the customary meals. Tecetl heard and answered his signals. Meantime, — last and heaviest of misfortunes, — the fire of the temple went out. When the sacred flame was first kindled is not known; relighted at the end of the last great cycle of fifty-two years, however, it had burned ever since, served by the paba. Year after year his steps, ascending and descending, had grown feebler; now they utterly failed. "Where is the fire on the old Cú?" asked the night-watchers of each other. "Dead," was the answer. "Then is Mualox dead."

And still another day like the other; and at its close the faded hands of the sufferer dropped upon his breast. Many

times did Tecetl come to the couch, and speak to him, and call him father, and offer him food and drink, and go away unnoticed. "He is with Quetzal," she would say to herself and the birds. "How the dear god loves him!"

Yet another, the fourth day; still the sleep, now become a likeness of death. And Tecetl, — she missed his voice, and the love-look of his great eyes, and his fondnesses of touch and smile; she missed his presence, also. True, he was there, but not with her; he was with Quetzal'. Strange that they should forget her so long! She hovered around the couch, a little jealous of the god, and disquieted, though she knew not by what. She was very, very lonesome.

And in that time what suspense would one familiar with perils have suffered in her situation! If the paba dies, what will become of her? We know somewhat of the difficulties of the passages in the Cú. Can she find the way out alone? The slave will, doubtless, continue to bring food to the door, so that she may not starve; and at the fountain she will get drink. Suppose, therefore, the supplies come for years, and she live so long; how will the solitude affect her? We know its results upon prisoners accustomed to society; but that is not her case: she never knew society, its sweets or sorrows. With her the human life of the great outside world is not a thing of conjecture, or of dreams, hopes, and fears, as the future life with a Christian; she does not even know there is such a state of being. Changes will take place in the chamber; the birds and plants, all of life there besides herself, will die; the body of the good man, through sickening stages of decay, will return to the dust, leaving a ghastly skeleton on the couch. Consequently, hers will come to be a solitude without relief, without amusement or occupation or society, and with but few memories, and nothing to rest a hope upon. Can a mind support itself, any more than a body? In other words,

if Mualox dies, how long until she becomes what it were charity to kill? Ah, never mortal more dependent or more terribly threatened! Yet she saw neither the cloud nor its shadow, but followed her pastimes as usual, and sang her little songs, and slept when tired, — a simple-hearted child.

I am not an abstractionist; and the reader, whom I charitably take to be what I am in that respect, has reason to be thankful; for the thought of this girl, so strangely educated, — if the word may be so applied, — this pretty plaything of a fortune so eccentric, opens the gates of many a misty field of metaphysics. But I pass them by, and, following the lead of my story, proceed to say that, in the evening of the fourth day of the paba's sickness, the bell, as usual, announced the last meal at the door of the chamber. Tecetl went to the couch, and, putting her arms around the sleeper's neck, tried to wake him; but he lay still, his eyes closed, his lips apart, — in appearance, he was dying.

"Father, father, why do you stay away so long?" she said. "Come back, — speak to me, — say one word, — call me once more!"

The dull ear heard not; the hand used to caressing was still.

Tenderly she smoothed the white beard upon his breast.

"Is Quetzal' angry with me? I love him. Tell him how lonely I am, and that the birds are not enough to keep me happy when you stay so long; tell him how dear you are to me. Ask him to let you come back now."

Yet no answer.

"O Quetzal', fair, beautiful god! hear me," she continued. "Your finger is on his lips, or he would speak. Your veil is over his eyes, or he would see me. I am his child, and love him so much; and he is hungry, and here are bread and meat. Let him come for a little while, and I will love you more than ever."

And so she prayed and promised, but in vain. Quetzal was obdurate. With tears fast flowing, she arose, and stood by the couch, and gazed upon the face now sadly changed by the long abstinence. And as she looked, there came upon her own face a new expression, that which the very young always have when at the side of the dying, — half dread, half curiosity, — wonder at the manifestation, awe of the power that invokes it, — the look we can imagine on the countenance of a simple soul in the presence of Death interpreting himself.

At last she turned away, and went to the door. Twice she hesitated, and looked back. Wherefore? Was she pondering the mystery of the deep sleep, or expecting the sleeper to awake, or listening to the whisper of a premonition fainter in her ears than the voice of the faintest breeze? She went on, nevertheless; she reached the door, and drew the curtain; and there, in the full light, was Orteguilla.

That we may judge the impression, let us recall what kind of youth the page was. I never saw him myself, but those who knew him well have told me he was a handsome fellow; tall, graceful, and in manner and feature essentially Spanish. He wore at the time the bonnet and jaunty feather, and the purple mantle, of which I have spoken, and under that a close black jerkin, with hose to correspond; half-boots, usual to the period, and a crimson sash about the waist, its fringed ends hanging down the left side, completed his attire. Altogether, a goodly young man; not as gay, probably, as some then loitering amongst the *alamedas* of Seville; for rough service long continued had tarnished his finery and abused his complexion, to say nothing of the imprints of present suffering; yet he was enough so to excite admiration in eyes older than Tecetl's, and more familiar with the race.

The two gazed at each other, wonder-struck.

"Holy Mother!" exclaimed Orteguilla, the bread in his hand. "Into what world have I been brought? Is this a spirit thou hast sent me?"

In his eyes, she was an angel; in hers, he was more. She went to him, and knelt, and said, "Quetzal, dear Quetzal, — beautiful god! You are come to bring my father back to me. He is asleep by the fountain."

In her eyes, the page was a god.

The paba's descriptions of Quetzal had given her the ideal of a youth like Orteguilla. Of late, moreover, he had been constantly expected from Tlapallan, his isle of the blest; indeed, he had come, — so the father said. And the house was his. Whither would he go, if not there? So, from tradition oft repeated, from descriptions colored by passionate love, she knew the god; and as to the man, — between the image and his maker there is a likeness; so saith a book holier than the *teomoxli*.

The page, as we have seen, was witty and shrewd, and acquainted well with the world; his first impression went quickly; her voice assured him that he was not come to any spirit land. The pangs of hunger, for the moment forgotten, returned, and I am sorry to say that he at once yielded to their urgency, and began to eat as heroes in romances never do. When the edge of his appetite was dulled, and he could think of something else, an impulse of courtesy moved him, and he said, —

"I crave thy pardon, fair mistress. I have been so much an animal as to forget that this food is thine, and required to subsist thee, and, perhaps, some other inhabiting here. I admit, moreover, that ordinarily the invitation should proceed from the owner of the feast; but claim thy own, and partake with me; else it may befall that in my great hunger thy share will be wanting. Fall to, I pray thee."

Still kneeling, she stared at him, and, folding her hands upon her breast, replied, "Quetzal' knows that I am his servant. Let him speak so that I may understand."

"*Por cierto!* — it is true! What knoweth she of my mother tongue?"

And thereupon, in the Aztecan, he asked her to help herself.

"No," said she. "The house and all belong to you. I am glad you have come."

"Mine? Whom do you take me for?"

"The good god of my father, to whom I say all my prayers, — Quetzal'!"

"Quetzal', Quetzal'!" he repeated, looking steadily in her face; then, as if assured that he understood her, he took one of the goblets of chocolate, and tried to drink, but failed; the liquid had been beaten into foam.

"In the world I come from, good girl," he said, replacing the cup, "people find need of water, which, just now, would be sweeter to my tongue than all the honey in the valley. Canst thou give me a drink?"

She arose, and answered eagerly, "Yes, at the fountain. Let us go. By this time my father is awake."

"So, so!" he said to himself. "Her father, indeed! I have eaten his supper or dinner, according to the time of day outside, and he may not be as civil as his daughter. I will first know something about him." And he asked, "Your father is old, is he not?"

"His beard and hair are very white. They have always been so."

Again he looked at her doubtingly. "Always, said you?"

"Always."

"Is he a priest?"

She smiled, and asked, "Does not Quetzal' know his own servant?"

"Has he company?"

"The birds may be with him."

He quit eating, and, much puzzled by the answer, reflected.

"Birds, birds! Am I so near daylight and freedom? Grant it, O Blessed Mother!" And he crossed himself devoutly.

Then Tecetl said, earnestly, "Now that you have eaten, good Quetzal', come and let us go to my father."

Orteguilla made up his mind speedily: he could not do worse than go back the way he came; and the light here was so beautiful, and the darkness there so terrible: and here was company. Just then, also, as a further inducement, he heard the whistle of a bird, and fancied he distinguished the smell of flowers.

"A garden," he said, in his soul, — "a garden, and birds, and liberty!" The welcome thought thrilled him inexpressibly. "Yes, I will go"; and, aloud, "I am ready."

Thereupon she took his hand, and put the curtains aside, and led him into the paba's World, never but once before seen by a stranger.

This time forethought had not gone in advance to prepare for the visitor. The master's eye was dim, and his careful hand still, in the sleep by the fountain. The neglect that darkened the fire on the turret was gloaming the lamps in the chamber; one by one they had gone out, as all would have gone but for Tecetl, to whom the darkness and the shadows were hated enemies. Nevertheless, the light, falling suddenly upon eyes so long filled with blackness as his had been, was blinding bright, insomuch that he clapped his hand over his face. Yet she led him on eagerly, saying, —

"Here, here, good Quetzal'. Here by the fountain he lies."

All her concern was for the paba.

And through the many pillars of stone, and along a walk

bounded by shrubs and all manner of dwarfed tropical trees, half blinded by the light, but with the scent of flowers and living vegetation in his nostrils, and the carol of birds in his ears, and full of wonder unspeakable, he was taken, without pause, to the fountain. At sight of the sparkling jet, his fever of thirst raged more intensely than ever.

"Here he is. Speak to him, — call him back to me! As you love him, call him back, O Quetzal!"

He scarcely heard her.

"Water, water! Blessed Mother, I see it again! A cup, — quick, — a cup!"

He seized one on the table, and drank, and drank again, crying between each breath, "To the Mother the praise!" Not until he was fully satisfied did he give ear to the girl's entreaty.

Looking to the couch, whither she had gone, he saw the figure of the paba stretched out like a corpse. He approached, and, searching the face, and laying his hand upon the breast over the heart, asked, in a low voice, "How long has your father been asleep?"

"A long time," she replied.

"*Jesu Christo!* He is dead, and she does not know it!" he thought, amazed at her simplicity.

Again he regarded her closely, and for the first time was struck by her beauty of face and form, by the brightness of her eyes, by the hair, wavy on the head and curling over the shoulders, by the simple, childish dress, and sweet voice; above all, by the innocence and ineffable purity of her look and manner, all then discernible in the full glare of the lamps. And with what feeling he made discovery of her loveliness may be judged passably well by the softened tone in which he said, "Poor girl! your father will never, never wake."

Her eyes opened wide.

"Never, never wake! Why?"

"He is dead."

She looked at him wistfully, and he, seeing that she did not understand, added, "He is in heaven; or, as he himself would have said, in the Sun."

"Yes, but you will let him come back."

He took note of the trustful, beseeching look with which she accompanied the words, and shook his head, and, returning to the fountain, took a seat upon a bench, reflecting.

"What kind of girl is this? Not know death when he showeth so plainly! Where hath she been living? And I am possessed of St. Peter's keys. I open Heaven's gate to let the heathen out! By the bones of the saints! let him get there first! The Devil hath him!"

He picked up a withered flower lying by the bowl of the fountain, and went back to Tecetl.

"You remember how beautiful this was when taken from the vine?"

"Yes."

"What ails it now?"

"It is dead."

"Well, did you ever know one of these, after dying, to come back to life?"

"No."

"No more can thy father regain his life. He, too, is dead. From what you see, he will go to dust; therefore, leave him now, and let us sit by the fountain, and talk of escape; for surely you know the way out of this."

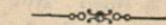
From the flower, she looked to the dead, and, comprehending the illustration, sat by the body, and cried. And so it happened that knowledge of death was her first lesson in life.

And he respected her grief, and went and took a bench by the basin, and thought.

"Quetzal, Quetzal, — who is he? A god, no doubt; yes,

the one of whom the king so liveth in dread. I have heard his name. And I am Quetzal! And this is his house—that is, my house! A scurvy trick, by St. James! Lost in my own house,—a god lost in his own temple!”

And as he could then well afford, being full-fed, he laughed at the absurd idea; and in such mood, fell into a reverie, and grew drowsy, and finally composed himself on the bench, and sunk to sleep.



CHAPTER IX.

LIFE IN THE PABA'S WORLD.

WHEN the page awoke, after a long, refreshing sleep, he saw the fountain first, and Tecetl next. She was sitting a little way off, upon a mat stretched on the floor. A number of birds were about her, whistling and coquetting with each other. One or two of very beautiful plumage balanced themselves on the edge of the basin, and bathed their wings in the crystal water. Through half-shut eyes, he studied her. She was quiet,—thinking of what? Of what do children think in their waking dreams? Yet he might have known, from her pensive look and frequent sighs, that the fountain was singing to deaf ears, and the birds playing their tricks before sightless eyes. She was most probably thinking of what he had so lately taught her, and nursed the great mystery as something past finding out; many a wiser head has done the same thing.

Now, Orteguilla was very sensible of her loveliness; he was no less sensible, also, that she was a mystery out of the common way of life; and had he been in a place of safety, in the palace of Axaya', he would have stayed a long time

pretending sleep, in order to study her unobserved. But his situation presently rose to mind; the yellow glow of the lamps suggested the day outside; the birds, liberty; the fountain and shrubbery, the world he had lost; and the girl, life,—his life, and all its innumerable strong attachments. And so, in his mind, he ran over his adventures in the house. He surveyed all of the chamber that was visible from the bench. The light, the fountain, the vegetation, the decorated walls,—everything in view dependent upon the care of man. Where so much was to be done constantly, was there not something to be done at once,—something to save life? There were the lamps: how were they supplied? They might go out. And, *Jesu Christo!* the corpse of the paba! He sat up, as if touched by a spear: there it was, in all the repulsiveness of death.

The movement attracted the girl's attention; she arose, and waited for him to speak.

“Good morning,—if morning it be,” he said.

She made no reply.

“Come here,” he continued. “I have some questions to ask.”

She drew a few steps nearer. A bird with breast of purple and wings of snow flew around her for a while, then settled upon her hand, and was drawn close to her bosom. He remembered, from Father Bartolomé's reading, how the love of God once before took a bird's form; and forthwith his piety and superstition hedged her about with sanctity. What with the white wings upon her breast, and the whiter innocence within, she was safe as if bound by walls of brass.

“Have no fear, I pray you,” he said, misinterpreting her respectful sentiment. “You and I are two people in a difficult strait, and, if I mistake not, much dependent upon each other. A God, of whom you never heard, but whom

I will tell you all about, took your father away, and sent me in his stead. The road thither, I confess, has been toilsome and dreadful. Ah me, I shudder at the thought!

He emphasized his feelings by a true Spanish shrug of the shoulders.

"This is a strange place," he next said. "How long have you been here?"

"I cannot say."

"Can you remember coming, and who brought you?"

"No."

"You must have been a baby." He looked at her with pity. "Have you never been elsewhere?"

"No, never."

"Ah, by the Mother that keeps me! Always here! And the sky, and sun, and stars, and all God's glory of nature, seen in the valleys, mountains, and rivers, and seas, — have they been denied you, poor girl?"

"I have seen them all," she answered.

"Where?"

"On the ceiling and walls."

He looked up at the former, and noticed its excellence of representation.

"Very good, — beautiful!" he said, in the way of criticism. "Who did the work?"

"Quetzal'."

"And who is Quetzal'?"

"Who should know better than the god himself?"

"Me?"

"Yes."

Again he shrugged his shoulders.

"My name, then, is Quetzal'. Now, what is yours?"

"Tecetl."

"Well, then, Tecetl, let me undeceive you. In the first place, I am not Quetzal', or any god. I am a man, as your

father there was. My name is Orteguilla; and for the time I am page to the great king Montezuma. And before long, if I live, and get out of this place, as I most devoutly pray, I will be a soldier. In the next place you are a girl, and soon will be a woman. You have been cheated of life. By God's help, I will take you out of this. Do you understand me?"

"No; unless men and gods are the same."

"Heaven forbid!" He crossed himself fervently. "Do you not know what men are?"

"All my knowledge of things is from the pictures on the walls, and what else you see here."

"*Jesu Christo!*" he cried, in open astonishment. "And did the good man never tell you of the world outside, — of its creation, and its millions upon millions of people?"

"No."

"Of the world in which you may find the originals of all that is painted on the walls, more beautiful than colors can make them?"

He received the same reply, but, still incredulous, went on.

"Who takes care of these plants?"

"My father."

"A servant brings your food to the door — may he do so again! Have you not seen him?"

"No."

"Where does the oil that feeds the lamps come from?"

"From Quetzal'."

Just then a lamp went out. He arose hastily, and saw that the contents of the cup were entirely consumed. "Tecetl, is there plenty of oil? Where do you keep it? Tell me."

"In a jar, there by the door. While you were asleep, I refilled the cups, and now the jar is empty."

He turned pale. Who better than he knew the value of

the liquid that saved them from the darkness so horribly peopled by hunger and thirst? If exhausted, where could they get more? Without further question, he went through the chamber, and collected the lamps, and put them all out except one. Then he brought the jar from the door, and poured the oil back, losing not a drop.

Tecetl remonstrated, and cried when she saw the darkness invade the chamber, blotting out the walls, and driving the birds to their perches, or to the fountain yet faintly illuminated. But he was firm.

"Fie, fie!" he said. "You should laugh, not cry. Did I not tell you about the world above this, so great, and so full of people, like ourselves? And did I not promise to take you there? I am come in your father's stead. Everything must contribute to our escape. We must think of nothing else. Do you understand? This chamber is but one of many, in a house big as a mountain, and full of passages in which, if we get lost, we might wander days and days, and then not get out, unless we had a light to show us the way. So we must save the oil. When this supply gives out, as it soon will if we are not careful, the darkness that so frightens you will come and swallow us, and we shall die, as did your father there."

The last suggestion sufficed; she dried her tears, and drew closer to him, as if to say, "I confide in you; save me."

Nature teaches fear of death; so that separation from the breathless thing upon the couch was not like parting from Mualox. Whether she touched his hand or looked in his face now, "Go hence, go hence!" was what she seemed to hear. The stony repulsion that substituted his living love reconciled her to the idea of leaving home, for such the chamber had been to her.

Here I may as well confess the page began to do a great deal of talking, — a consequence, probably, of having a good

listener; or he may have thought it a duty to teach all that was necessary to prepare his disciple for life in the new world. In the midst of a lecture, the tinkle of a bell brought him to a hasty pause.

"Now, O Blessed Mother, now I am happy! Thou hast not forsaken me! I shall see the sun again, and brave old Spain. Live my heart!" he cried, as the last tinkle trembled, and died in the silence.

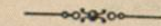
Seeing that she regarded him with surprise, he said, in her tongue, "I was thanking the Mother, Tecetl. She will save us both. Go now, and bring the breakfast, — I say breakfast, not knowing better, — and while we eat I will tell you why I am so glad. When you have heard me, you will be glad as I am."

She went at once, and, coming back, found him bathing his face and head in the water of the basin, — a healthful act, but not one to strengthen the idea of his godship. She placed the tray upon the table, and helped him to napkin and comb; then they took places opposite each other, with the lamp between them; whereupon she had other proof of his kind of being; for it is difficult to think of a deity at table, eating. The Greeks felt the incongruity, and dined their gods on nectar and ambrosia, leaving us to imagine them partaken in some other than the ordinary, vulgar way. Verily, Tecetl was becoming accustomed to the stranger!

And while they ate, he explained his plans, and talked of the upper world, and described its wonders and people, until, her curiosity aroused, she plied him with questions; and as point after point was given, we may suppose nature asserted itself, and taught her, by what power there is in handsome youth, with its bright eyes, smooth face, and tongue more winsome than wise, that life in the said world was a desirable exchange for the monotonous drifting to

which she had been so long subjected. We may also suppose that she was not slow to observe the difference between Mualox and the page; which was that between age and youth, or, more philosophically, that between a creature to be revered and a creature to be admired.

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CHAPTER X.

THE ANGEL BECOMES A BEADSWOMAN.

THE stars at the foot of the last chapter I called in as an easy bridge by which to cross an interval of two days, — a trick never to be resorted to except when there is nothing of interest to record, as was the case here.

Orteguilla occupied the interval very industriously, if not pleasantly. He had in hand two tasks, — one to instruct Tecetl about the world to which he had vowed to lead her; the other to fix upon a plan of escape. The first he found easy, the latter difficult; yet he had decided, and his preparations for the attempt, sufficient, he thought, though simple, lay upon the floor by the fountain. A lamp shed a dim light over the scene.

"So, so, Tecetl: are we ready now?" he asked.

"You are the master," she replied.

"Very good, I will be assured."

He went through a thorough inspection.

"Here are the paint and brush; here the oil and lamp; here the bread and meat, and the calabash of water. So far, good, very good. And here is the mat, — very comfortable, Tecetl, if you have to make your bed upon a stone in the floor. Now, are we ready?"

"Yes, if you say so."

"Good again! The Mother is with us. Courage! You shall see the sun and sky, or I am not a Spaniard. Listen, now, and I will explain."

They took seats upon the bench, this time together; for the strangeness was wellnigh gone, and they had come to have an interest in a common purpose.

"You must know, then, that I have two reliances: first, the man who brings the tray to the door; next, the Blessed Mother."

"I will begin with the first," he said, after a pause. "The man is a slave, and, therefore, easy to impose upon. If he is like his class, from habit, he asks no questions of his superiors. Your father — I speak from what you have told me — was thoughtful and dreamy, and spoke but little to anybody, and seldom, if ever, to his servants. You are not well versed in human nature; one day, no doubt, you will be; then you will be able to decide whether I am right in believing that the traits of master and slave, which I have mentioned, are likely to help us. I carried your father's body over to the corner yonder, — you were asleep at the time, — and laid it upon the floor, as we Christians serve our dead. I made two crosses, and put one upon his lips, the other on his breast; he will sleep all the better for them. As you would have done, had you been present, I also covered him with flowers. One other thing I did."

He took a lamp, and was gone a moment.

"Here are your father's gown and hood," he said, coming back. "I doubt whether they would sell readily in the market. He will never need them again. I took them to help save your life, — a purpose for which he would certainly have given them, had he been alive. I will put them on."

He laid his bonnet on the bench; then took off his boots,